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9-27-2006

Joyce Burleigh interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project

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Joyce Burleigh

Wright State University - Main Campus

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Holdcraft, C., & Burleigh, J. (2006). Joyce Burleigh interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. .

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

JOYCE BURLEIGH

SEPTEMBER 27, 2006

CAROL HOLDCRAFT: Today is September the twenty-seventh, two thousand and six and we are interviewing Joyce Burleigh for our College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. And present in the room is Stacey Baldwin whose a graduate student working on the Oral History Project and she's manning the equipment. And I am Carol Holdcraft doing the interviewing and Joyce is on our speakerphone. We are doing a phone interview with Joyce today.

JB: Okay, my name is Joyce Burleigh and I've agreed to this interview over the phone and I'm a graduate of Wright State University School of Nursing.

CH: Okay, well we'll go ahead and just kind of get started and we usually start out, Joyce, by asking people to tell us a little bit about your personal background and how it was you came to be at Wright State.

JB: I came here in nineteen seventy-eight. My husband was a captain in the Air Force and they discovered that he had cancer. He had been on a remote for a year. So they sent him here to Wright-Patt. In September of seventy-nine my husband died and at that point I had never worked. I was a stay at home wife and mom and I did not have a college education. The Air Force said that they would give me one year to move anywhere in the United States and they would give me ten years to pay for me to get a degree since I did not have a job marketable skill. I decided to stay put here because the university was right here and in January of eighty-one I took my first class at Wright State University and that's how I started.

CH: Okay. That's good. So you started in nineteen eighty-one.

JB: I took one class.

CH: Okay.

JB: It had been awhile since I had been in school so I think I was thirty-four. So it had been, since I had been in school at eighteen, graduated from high school at seventeen and I think I was thirty-four.

CH: What was that like for you?

JB: It was very scary. I thought I was going to be a wife and a mom and my husband was going to take care of me and things changed. I told my kids that I grew up at thirty-two. So it was very scary. That's the reason I took one class. At the time I didn't know what I was going to get my degree in. I didn't even know if I was going to be able to stay in school. I just had not been to college so I had no clue. And so I took one class that winter quarter and one class spring quarter because my daughter, my youngest one was just in kindergarten. And then in September I started taking my undergraduates and started thinking about being a nurse. I think it was that following summer that I took my anatomy class.

CH: Okay. So you started very slowly, one class at a time with small children at home. And what was that like being a student at Wright State's campus at that point?

JB: Campus was very small so I really didn't consider myself a student on the campus. I was just going there to get classes because I had two kids in school, they were small children and so I didn't really consider myself a student on the campus. I was just going there to get something that I needed and to come home to my children and take care of them.

CH: So did that feeling change over time or was that the way you continued.

TB: No. That's the way I thought through the whole process. My kids were number one. If there was any problems, you know if I had to make a choice it was my kids came first. I took one class and I can remember telling the professor because she wanted everybody to contract for a grade and everybody contracted for an A and I put in a contract for a C. She was visibly upset with me and said I didn't have my priorities straight and I said yes I did. I said I could retake her class but I could not re-live that summer with my children. So, you know I went to school to get my degree but I never felt like I was a part of the university or the campus or whatever because I had kids and my priority were my children.

CH: And where there other women like you in your classes who were-?

JB: There were other women, some divorced, some married. There were more, I think, single. It took me so long and I went through so many people because it took me, I didn't graduate until eighty-eight. So, it took me awhile. But I pretty much, I had my friends here. I mean I studied with people but for the most part I had my adult friends that I knew through my children, through school and neighbors and so I essentially just associated with them. I didn't do that much with people at the university because I needed to be home when the kids got home and feed dinner and pay bills and clean a house and take them to their outside school activities. So, no, I pretty much, I really was not that involved.

CH: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, tell us about some of the things that you remember about your curriculum and your classes and those kinds of things that you did as a nursing student here.

JB: Well the one thing like I was telling you about the teacher who was upset with me because I didn't, I wouldn't agree to an A. I got an A in the class but I wouldn't contract for an A. That kind of bothered me that she was like you know, your priorities aren't straight and to me I think your children should come first especially being a single parent. I can remember that when we went to a nursing home, my first clinical was in a nursing home and I said you know, we don't even know CPR, we don't even know the Heimlich. We don't have anything. And I said shouldn't we know this stuff before we go into a clinical setting and the teacher at that time said well you're going to learn that. That's down the road. So I thought, and we did, we learned it at the end of the quarter and I thought shouldn't we have known the Heimlich if we were dealing with older people? I mean that's what I thought. But there was just, what I mainly remember was stress. What I mainly remember was stress. Stress because of being a nurse and the education that you needed and the classes that you had to take and that you would be responsible for a life. So, I remember the stress that you had to know everything and then the stress also of you know, being a single parent. I just remember being under a lot of stress and doing a lot of homework and a lot of studying, a lot of studying. Luckily I had parents that would sometimes take my kids for a couple of weeks if I had big tests going. And when we had clinicals my parents came and took care of the kids so I could do my clinicals. So, it was very stressful. The one professor that I remember who made a huge difference because I thought about dropping out of school and it was Nancy Tremble and when I had a class with her she totally turned it around for me and just made a huge

difference. She was just a wonderful; I mean that's the one professor that I truly remember that made a huge difference in my life.

CH: And what specifically did she do that made such a difference to you?

JB: She treated me like a human being. She treated me that I wasn't, I mean I understood that I didn't know as much as my professors, I understood that but she didn't treat me like I was an idiot that didn't know anything. And that was my feeling going through the program was that you were afraid to try anything because if you didn't do it right they would berate you or make it difficult for you. And she was like come on let's go do this, we'll show how to do it and she wouldn't let you make a mistake to the point of hurting somebody but she understood that if you were doing it the first time was going to be different on a patient versus in the lab because I remember in the lab you'd go to do trach care and you put the little tube down, la, di, da, di, da. The first time you did it the patient was fighting you and coughing and spitting and it wasn't anything like that little dummy that laid there and didn't do anything. So it was different once you did it on a human being. And it was Nancy Tremble; I mean everybody in the class that I took that class with felt the same way. She made you feel comfortable and secure with yourself that you wanted to search out things to try and do for the first time because she was there to guide you and help you. And that's what I really remember about her.

CH: Sounds like that was a really positive experience but it sounds like some of the other experiences you had weren't so positive.

JB: It wasn't. I mean I have to admit I do not have really very, very good warm fuzzies about my years at Wright State in the School of Nursing. And again, maybe because of my circumstances, because of my children and the death of a husband and putting everything together but it was stressful. It was very stressful.

CH: Well, one of the questions I typically ask is what were the challenges you faced and it sounds like you've shared a number of those challenges that had to do with your circumstances.

JB: I know with my kids; I told my kids education was the one thing, I said you can say you're going to get married but you may not get married but even if you do get married

there isn't any guarantees that that marriage will last and I was the perfect example. And so I said you want to go to college right out of high school when it's fresh in your mind and you remember everything and you can just go to school and be in school instead of having to raise children and having to take care of a house and having to take care of, you know if a child is up sick all night and you had a test the next day and you know everything that other people go through. I mean I was not unique by any means but that was, those were the things that I just remember, it was very stressful.

CH: Yeah.

JB: So I think going to college right out of high school has got to be better.

CH: Describe for us some of your interactions with faculty members.

JB: Back then?

CH: Yes.

JB: Well I told you about Nancy. That was, she was wonderful. I mean I saw her outside of, after I graduated I saw her outside of the school setting. Um, some of the teachers were very helpful. I mean they would try to be helpful to you. Some of the teachers would; I can remember one teacher that I was to give an injection and the lab had showed me one way and she wanted it this other way which I didn't know because the lab had taught me the other way. And she got very upset with me and said she wasn't going to let me give the shot and I said well that's fine. I said you know if you don't want me to give the shot that's fine I'll just leave. But you know, that I thought she could have taken me aside instead of in front of other people and said this is what I was looking for because then when she finally did tell me that was what she was looking for I said but that's not the way I was taught in the lab. This is the way I was taught in the lab and she said oh, I didn't know that. And so, you know I just thought well you could have, you know I'm not an eighteen year old. I'm almost close to forty and I'm not going to do something dumb. So, I don't know it was just, some of the teachers were approachable, some of the teachers weren't. It just depended. So, I can't specifically name names and I think part of it is for the most part like I said I would go to class and come home. I didn't stay on the campus and do anything. So maybe that was the difference between my education and somebody else's.

CH: Right. Do you remember any interactions that you had with administrators within the college?

JB: No.

CH: Okay.

JB: Not a personal one on one. You know they would come to class and everyone would be there but I mean for the most part no. It was just with your professors.

CH: Uh-huh. The one on one kind of thing.

JB: Yeah.

CH: And how about with fellow students?

JB: There were some that, like I said because I was going part time and it took me from eighty-one to eighty-eight to graduate there were a lot of students that of course I would meet and then they would go on because they were going full time and I wasn't. So, there were some that we had in the class at the time that we would study together but I didn't really interact with anybody after I graduated.

CH: Uh-huh. So, partly probably because of the way in which you went to college you didn't really develop a peer group that stayed together longer than a quarter.

JB: Correct. No. Right. And like I said, I didn't come in with a group and stay with a group for four years. It was everybody was, because I was going part time and everybody else was going full time and they would go during the summer and I would take summers off to be with my kids. And so I didn't really get any close attachment to anybody from my class.

CH: And so you've already said that you really didn't develop an attachment to Wright State per say.

JB: No.

CH: What as your recollection about the community's view point of Wright State at that point?

JB: Truthfully back in those days I can remember talking to a nurse and she said that when they would find out if they were getting a new nurse on the floor they would go great we're going to get a new nurse and then she said when they would find out it was a Wright State student graduate they'd go huh because they would have to teach them more skills because I can remember one time talking to a professor who said we, at Wright State because it was a BSN program and back in those days the BSN was around but I don't think it was around as much as the two or the three year programs. And so they said that the reason why they didn't push our clinical skills was because they were preparing us to be in charge, to be charge nurses or in an office or whatever. So, they said that's the reason they didn't really push at that time the skills at that time. And so a lot of the community nurses would say you know they really had to work with the Wright State graduates because our skills weren't that great. And I can tell you that when I graduated from Wright State I gave one shot the entire time. I only gave one shot.

CH: Huh.

JB: And so, you know it was kind of like some of the other nurses who graduated from a two or three-year program were like holey-moley you've got to be kidding me. And I was like no, that's it I just gave one shot the entire time. So, I think you know, and they told us they were preparing us to be BSN nurses, to go and be in charge not to be; we were not meant to be on the floor and be a floor nurse.

CH: Okay. And so what was your experience after you graduated like?

JB: Well, I went into school nursing. I did not work in a hospital. I went into school nursing. I did some on my own, I went out and followed some people like in the emergency room where I followed some other nurses just to get my skills down but so I didn't work in a hospital I worked in a school setting. But I think my skills came through because I had many students injured. I've had amputations, broken bones and I even had a student go into full cardiac arrest so my skills were there.

CH: Uh-huh. So some of that having been taught but not necessarily having done that you were told, actually came through with you and so you still were able to perform and function.

JB: Correct but I set up last year because some of us, I mean things change, when I went through school things are different now; traches and cats and I mean everything. And so, I went through a unit, I went through Kettering College and they set up a skills lab and they did an in-service for all the school nurses and updated us on a lot of the new items that are out there that because children are being sent to school that are ill there are more medically fragile children attending school. I felt the need that we really needed to have a review and so Kettering Hospital, their School of Nursing agreed to it and did it for free to our school.

CH: That's great. So, tell me some more then about some of your relationships with community institutions such as hospitals or agencies or other types of things both while you were a student and immediately after graduating.

JB: Well the only place I have is when I graduated in eighty-nine, I graduated with my BSN in eighty-eight and then I went back to Wright State for a year because to be a school nurse you had to have school nurse certification and at that time it was through the School of Education. So, I did not really graduate then until eighty-nine so that's when I got hired was in August of eighty-nine at Dayton Public Schools. So, I've been with Dayton Public Schools since eighty-nine when I left Wright State. So that is the only institution I have worked for. I remember I hated my rotation in Children's. I decided I definitely could not be a nurse at Children's. The first four cases I had the children were dying and it just; I couldn't separate the mother in me. So, I knew I could never work at Children's. And I enjoyed working at Miami Valley Hospital. I did a rotation there and in their cancer ward and I think because of what I went through with my husband I thought if I didn't do anything else that I would have enjoy doing. And I did a rotation at Wright Patt in the surgical clinic in the operating room and I enjoyed that too. I really liked that but when they put me with the school as a school nurse I decided that's what I really wanted to do. Plus it gave me the hours with my children, to be with my kids having the summers off. So that was part of the draw. So my last year at that time they let you the quarter that you graduated, the quarter before you graduated they let you pick wherever you wanted to go and have another whole quarter of it to make sure that that's what you wanted to go into. So I asked to go into Dayton Public Schools and they said fine. So I spent the whole quarter with a school nurse and she had three schools at that time and I spent almost the entire quarter with her in the school setting with Dayton Public Schools.

CH: So it sounds like the variety and the flexibility that you had did sort of allow you to decide what you wanted to do.

JB: Yeah, oh yeah and like I said they let you, that last quarter, you could pick where you wanted to go. So, I picked school nursing just to make sure and it was kind of like yep this is what I want to do.

CH: So at that time, Joyce, was that considered a precepted experience where all of the students paired up with one individual nurse?

JB: I did. When we were in our clinicals you mean?

CH: Yes.

JB: Because when we were in the hospitals it would be like one professor and maybe four or five students.

CH: Uh-huh.

JB: But when I went out into the community we did, one of the things we did in the community we went to a retirement village in Xenia and there was a group of us with a professor but when I did my school nurse rotation I was the only nurse, student nurse with that school nurse. I was with her the entire time. Well the first time I was with her for half of the quarter. You did half of the quarter and then the following year when you got to pick that final quarter before you graduated then I spent the whole quarter with her. I spent almost three months with her. And I was her only student.

CH: Okay. I guess I'm trying to figure out whether that was, she was called your preceptor and did other students have experiences with just one nurse?

JB: As far as I know because I know that I get students and when I have a student I have one student.

CH: Okay.

JB: I don't have you know three or four students. I have, I mean the professor may have four or five students but in the school setting I only have one student with me. I've never had more than one student.

CH: Okay.

JB: And I've, we've had student nurses since I've got hired.

CH: Okay.

JB: As a matter of fact one of them, I always laughed because Barb Murphy who was one of my professors when I was going through Wright State became a school nurse at Wright State and I had to be her mentor. I thought that was really funny because she was my teacher.

CH: Sure, those kinds of changes sometimes take place.

JB: Yes.

CH: How would you say your experience at Wright State affected your career since that time?

JB: Since I graduated?

CH: Yeah.

JB: Um, I can't say that it did or it didn't. I mean maybe if I had been in a hospital it might be different but in the school setting I mean you just you don't go, there isn't a position to go higher. You're just in a school so I think allowing me maybe to be one, to spend one whole quarter with a school nurse allowed me to know that that's really what I wanted to do. I don't know if other universities do that but I don't know that they did because a school nurse is so different from a hospital nurse. So being mentored by another school nurse I was, the nurse that I had been with while I was a student then was assigned as my mentor. And so for two years she was my mentor while I was going through, while I was being a school nurse and any situations she taught me how to screen because we didn't learn that, how to do health screening. We didn't do that at Wright State and CSB, how to call in you know for Children's Services if a child's abused or anything like that. So allowing me to spend a whole quarter with a school nurse that's how they helped me because they couldn't really prepare you to be a school nurse. And even when I did, I guess it's different now, when I went through it it was through the School of Education. Now it is under the School of Nursing but when I did it too they didn't really prepare me because it was all over there in the School of Education. It was a professor who is my professor throughout the whole year that I was in that program.

CH: Yes.

JB: And he said you know I don't know why I'm doing this because I'm not a nurse and I have no clue.

CH: Right. I think once it came under the College of Nursing it has changed.

JB: Yes, it's changed. It's different from when I went through it.

CH: A little bit more of a nursing perspective on it.

JB: Correct. It was all educational. Everything was, it was, they wanted me to learn to how to write lesson plans and I'm like okay I'm not going to do lesson plans.

CH: Right.

JB: So, I guess just giving me that quarter to spend with the school nurse is how they helped me but it really took a nurse, a school nurse to show me the ropes.

CH: Uh-huh. The specifics of that job.

JB: Correct. You know I think if you learn how to do cath care, trach care and you go into the hospital, wound care that is kind of standard but it really is different when you go in to become a school nurse.

CH: Uh-huh. Those tasks were not done anywhere else, some of the things that you do.

JB: Correct.

CH: Are there anything that I have not asked you about that you would like to share that you think is pertinent to our Oral History Project that we are doing.

JB: No, I mean that's kind of like I said my take on it. It's, I'm sure it's totally different than when I went to school. There's been a change of professors and administration and philosophy. So I'm sure it's totally different than when I went through it. So I think you asked all the-.

CH: Yeah. Okay. You started your program, you started at Wright State in eighty-one-.

JB: January of eighty-one.

CH: And there was considerable turmoil in terms of faculty shake up that occurred in nineteen eighty. Were you aware of any of those things when you were a student here.

JB: The only reason that I knew about them is a friend of mine graduated from the program I think in eighty-three, I think and I watched what she went through which was a nightmare. I mean it was nothing compared to what, I mean what she went through, what I went through, nothing. And so she has told me about it but I don't think I saw it too much because I started in eighty-one but I wasn't in the School of Nursing.

CH: Right.

JB: I was just taking; I took a writing class that's all I took. So I wasn't aware, it was probably, it was probably two years down the road, I mean I took the anatomy class but it was probably two years down the road before I started getting into the nursing. So I think the big brunt of everything was already passed. So I wouldn't have known anything about it if my friend hadn't told me I would have known nothing about it but she told me what she went through.

CH: And so from your perspective things felt pretty stable at the time that you were in the class.

JB: Correct. Compared to what she went through, yeah. Yes. I mean you know we all had the stories that we laughed about but yeah compared, it was quiet because like I said it was a couple years down the road before I really started getting into my nursing classes.

CH: Okay. Okay, well Stacey's sitting here, she's been listening. Stacey are there any questions that you have for Joyce?

SB: No, I don't think so. Joyce, I think you shared some really good experiences and good stories with us.

JB: And I also graduated from Wright State with my masters.

CH: So tell us about that.

JB: Well, it was kind of, I started down at UC, to get, I was going to be a pediatric nurse practitioner and I got accepted into their program and then they changed all their classes to; that they had to be day classes instead of night classes. So then I transferred back here to Wright State and got accepted into the Family Nurse Practitioner program. And with going through that and then it was kind of like well you know once you get ready for your clinical you're going to have to quit your job because you have to go full time in your clinicals which I had at the time two kids in college and I'm like well I've got to work. You know I've got two kids in college and I had two kids not only in college graduating but also getting ready to get married in the same year too. So I then transferred into the child and adolescent program since I was in a high school. That's what I got my degree in.

CH: Uh-huh. So you're a child and adolescent nurse practitioner?

JB: Nope. No, I'm not a nurse practitioner. I've got my masters in child and adolescent health through the School of Nursing but I am not a nurse practitioner. They said if I took a year of clinicals and sat for boards I probably could become a nurse practitioner but no I'm not going to. I'm done with school. I'm finished. I'm done.

CH: Okay. So, you did more within that track you did more the CNS type role, than the practitioner type roles.

JB: Correct. In that program?

CH: Yes.

JB: No, I mean once I got out of the nurse practitioner program I wasn't in it.

CH: Okay.

JB: The child and adolescent, I don't know if they still have it. I graduated in ninety-eight and there were like ten to fifteen of us taking that but it was not, I came out of the nurse practitioner program and then just went into child and adolescent health.

CH: Okay.

JB: So I was not in a nurse practitioner program once I left the family nurse practitioner program.

CH: So how were your clinicals different in the program that you transferred into than they would have been? How did they work into your life better?

JB: Um, we didn't really have clinicals. It was mainly classes; I mean ninety-five percent of it. I did, I followed a nurse, a midwife and went through some births to see what that was like but that was really the only clinicals that I did. It was really not a clinical because it was not a nurse practitioner program per say. It was just child and adolescent health and we talked about the law and what we could do and just different things like that. And since I was in a school setting and in a high school I thought it would just, that's what I would get my masters in because I wanted to get my masters.

CH: Okay and that what really pertained to things you needed at school.

JB: Correct.

CH: So you earned that in?

JB: Ninety-eight.

CH: Ninety-eight.

JB: Yeah, I got, I graduated from the BS program in eighty-eight and I graduated with the School Nurse certification in eighty-nine and I think I started back in ninety-three. I can't quite remember the year but I graduated from the program in ninety-eight, spring of ninety-eight.

CH: And so I'm hearing sort of a winding path there that once again the theme for you was that your children and your family and some of their needs came first and dictated where you went with your education.

JB: Yes, I mean you can't very well quit your job when you've got two girls in college and two weddings coming up.

CH: Right.

JB: And I don't regret it. I don't regret it.

CH: And so were you awarded an award through the college a few years ago?

JB: Yes. Not last year but the year before I got the Cameo of Caring for school nursing.

CH: Tell us about that.

JB: They have different, there was like eighteen of us and there are all different areas and mine was in the school setting, in school nursing.

CH: And so the School Nurse- Nursing Organization, professional organization was the one that selected you. Is that correct?

JB: Well my understanding is another school nurse submitted my name but my understanding is that there is a group from Wright State because the next year they asked me if I could do it but by the time I got the message I couldn't do it because they had already gotten the people to do it. But I think they get other nurses and Wright State people and they're the ones who go through the people who are nominated and then they make the selection on who will get the award. That was my understanding because I said well there must not have been any other school nurses and they said oh yeah there was. And so I was kind of like okay because at Dayton I know there were some nurses that are a lot better or more deserving than me. But they said it was different people at Wright State who read through everything and then made the decision on who would get the award.

CH: Uh-huh. Well, that's quite impressive. So, two different alumni awards, an Alumni Award and a Cameo of Caring Award.

JB: And I've done some really neat things, I think, in my school setting. I started a program with midwives and had a midwifery program clinic that my pregnant teens; that was set up in the school to see if that would make a difference and it did. And then I went in with another nurse at Wright State and we were one of four picked for an HIV national grant and so we did that and then I got that award. So it's been interesting.

CH: So it sounds like your educational experience has served you well in terms of being able to do things that gained some recognition but as well did some really good things for your school and your community.

JB: Yes.

CH: Well thank you very much for sharing your experiences and we are very proud to have you as an alumni of Wright State.

JB: Well thank you.

CH: And we thank you very much for participating in the Oral History Project.

END OF INTERVIEW